

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

REGULAR COURSE
1938-1939

Night Marches

Action of Australian and Indian Units.

Battle of Sari Bair, Gallipoli,

August 6-7, 1915

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I. INTRODUCTION.

In August, 1915 a British force on the Gallipoli Peninsula, based at Anzac Beach had been generally unsuccessful in extending its foot hold by frontal attacks. It was decided to seize the commanding ridge of Sari Bair by a movement the night of August 6th-7th. (Map No.1)

The forces which will be discussed here; were the Left Covering Force which was to occupy the spur of Damakjelik, and the Left Assault Column which had the mission of being in position in readiness to assault Hill Q and Hill 971 before daybreak August, 7th.

Question: Do the Field Service Regulations authorize an approach to the point of attack under cover of darkness?

Answer: Yes. Par. 558 F.S.R. states: "Night operations may be resorted to for-----executing an approach march and deployment preparatory to launching an attack at daybreak."

II. OPERATION OF LEFT COVERING FORCE.

Of the Left Covering Force it is sufficient to say that its two battalions were completely successful in their mission of occupying the Damakjelik Spur and thus protecting the left flank of the Left Assault Column. (Map No.2)

III. THE ACTION OF THE LEFT ASSAULT COLUMN.

We will now discuss the action of the Left Assault Column. This force under the command of Maj-Gen. Cox, consisted of the 4th. Australian Brigade, the 29th Indian Brigade, and a battery of Indian Mountain Artillery.

The terrain over which these troops were to operate is difficult to say the least. (Map No.2 and Map No.3) It is a country of steep hills divided by precipitous, narrow valleys. Also, the ground is covered by a thick, thorny growth of scrub.

The route of approach (Overlay, Map No.2 and Map No.3) of these troops was by way of the seacoast until they reached the mouth of the Aghyl Dere, then up this steep valley. About half way up this valley two Australian battalions were to be thrown out to the left in order to provide an outpost. The main column was to march to the head of the valley. There, two Indian battalions were to continue to the eastward to the assault of Hill Q. The remainder of the force was to turn to the northeast, cross the ridge into the Asma Dere, then climb the spur of Abdel Rahman and reform for the attack on Hill 971. All forces were to be in position for the final assault by 1:30 A.M.

The route of march was within the Turkish lines and maps of the area were known to be very unreliable. However, every possible means of learning the terrain was taken. Major Overton a New Zealand officer, had made a series of daring scouts within the Turkish lines. Furthermore, many officers had been taken on destroyers close in to the coast line and thus were able to gain some idea of the country. Aerial reconnaissance, although in its infancy, was used also. This procedure follows our Field Service Regulations Par. 320 which states: "Night marches are carefully prepared. The route is, whenever practicable, reconnoitered prior to the commencement of the march."

Major Overton was to lead the column in person, also the service of a native of the district was secured as a guide.

The column was to cross the initial point, Reserve Gully, at 9:30 P.M. Preparations were thorough, a time table was prepared giving the times various points were to be reached. There was a staff officer at the head of the column to regulate its pace to the time table. In accordance to our F.S.R. Par. 322 that "-----cavalry and light artillery usually follow the Infantry" and the teaching of the Infantry School that whenever practicable, animals are separated from the foot column, no animals were to be taken except the artillery gun mules which were at the rear.

Rifles were ordered to be kept unloaded and all fighting was to be with the bayonet. In connection with this, our F.S.R. Par. 564 states that "-----In the conduct of night attacks---the enemy is rushed with the bayonet without firing."

Promptly at 9:30 P.M. the column moved out, the Australian Brigade in the lead. For a short time the pace was brisk but as the head of the column reached Outpost No.2 it had to halt while a portion of the Left Covering Force crossed its path. Thus it was 11:00 P.M. before the column was able to move again.

Soon the pace was slowed again. The difficulty this time was due to the native guide persuading Maj. Overton who was leading the column, that a shorter way into the Aghyl Dere lay up the gully behind Walden Point. This way was undoubtedly shorter but it proved to be narrow and overgrown. Much time was lost forcing through the thick scrub.

As the head of the column struggled up this trail, it was fired upon from the right. A platoon was sent to clear out this resistance, another platoon was sent to the left and the column continued. When the head of the column reached the Aghyl Dere more enemy were encountered and soon two companies were engaged in clearing up the Turkish resistance. It was now 1:00 A.M. The short cut had proved disastrous, the column was now over two hours behind schedule.

At this moment the commander of the 4th. Australian Brigade reached the front. General Monash ordered the column to move up the valley at once without waiting for the return of the two detached companies.

The guides were undecided as to the exact point in the Aghyl Dere that the column had reached owing to the change in route. However it was decided that the point had been reached where the two leading battalions were to be detached to the left. After a good deal of delay the 13th. and 14th. Battalions moved out to the ridge line to the left and the

rest of the column continued the march.

Soon the Australians were fired on again but the Turks were rushed with the bayonet. Thus again we see the proper use of weapons at night.

At three O'clock the head of the column was opposite a draw leading to the northeast. The guides believed now that the point had been reached where the main body was to leave the Aghyl Dere. Accordingly the 15th. and 16th Bns. struck out to the northeast over the left ridge in the direction of the Abdel Rahman Spur. Although the ground was very rough and the Turks contested the advance obstinately the two battalions made rapid progress as it was now getting light. Soon they came out on a high knoll from which the surrounding country could be observed. Directly to the front could be seen the Abdel Rahman Ridge rising to Hill 971. To the left on the same ridge that the 15th. and 16th. were standing, could be seen the 13th. and 14th. Bns. digging in.

Although the 15th. and 16th. had not reached their objective, it was now 5:00 A.M., the men were utterly exhausted and orders were issued to hold their present positions.

Meanwhile the Indian Battalions which had been in the rear of the Australian Brigade moved up. The 14th. Sikhs and the 5th. Gurkhas moved to the right of the 15th. and 16th. Australian Battalions, taking position on the high ground at the head of the Aghyl Dere. The two battalions which were to assault Hill Q lost their direction and finally came to a halt much to the south and west of their objective.

Thus we see that instead of being in position in readiness to assault Hill 971 and Hill Q at 1:30 A.M., (Overlay Map No.2) at daylight the forces were far to the west of their objectives. (Map No.2)

IV. RECAPITULATION OF PRINCIPLES

The Field Service Regulations and the literature pub-

lishes by the Infantry School lay down certain definite principles in regard to night movements. Among them are the necessity of surprise, control of units, separation of animals from the foot column, the unloading of rifles, guides, and above all, the necessity of proper reconnaissance and study of the route.

In the action of the troops of Gen. Cox on the night of Aug. 6th-7th, 1915, we see these principles typified. All preparations for the march were made with the greatest secrecy, the troops started their march well back of the advanced posts. Thus the Turks were completely surprised by the maneuver.

The control of the column was good, staff officers were provided to coordinate and regulate the rate of march. There is no evidence that any unit became lost from the column.

We have seen how all animals were relegated to the rear and thus were of no hindrance to the march.

Rifles were ordered to be unloaded. Some units simply closed the bolt on an empty chamber, others left the magazines empty. Therefore there was no example of troops firing into their own friends as is common in night operations. When enemy were encountered they were quickly subdued or thrown aside by the use of the bayonet.

Guides were provided who were familiar with the ground. Although the native guide might have been supposed to have been familiar with the ground, a too great readiness to accept his advice proved to be unfortunate in this case. The short cut he suggested behind Walden Point may have been perfectly practicable for the natives of the district, moving in small parties and in the daylight. However it was entirely unsuitable for the night march of a large body of troops. From this we see that although native civilian guides may be useful, their advice cannot always

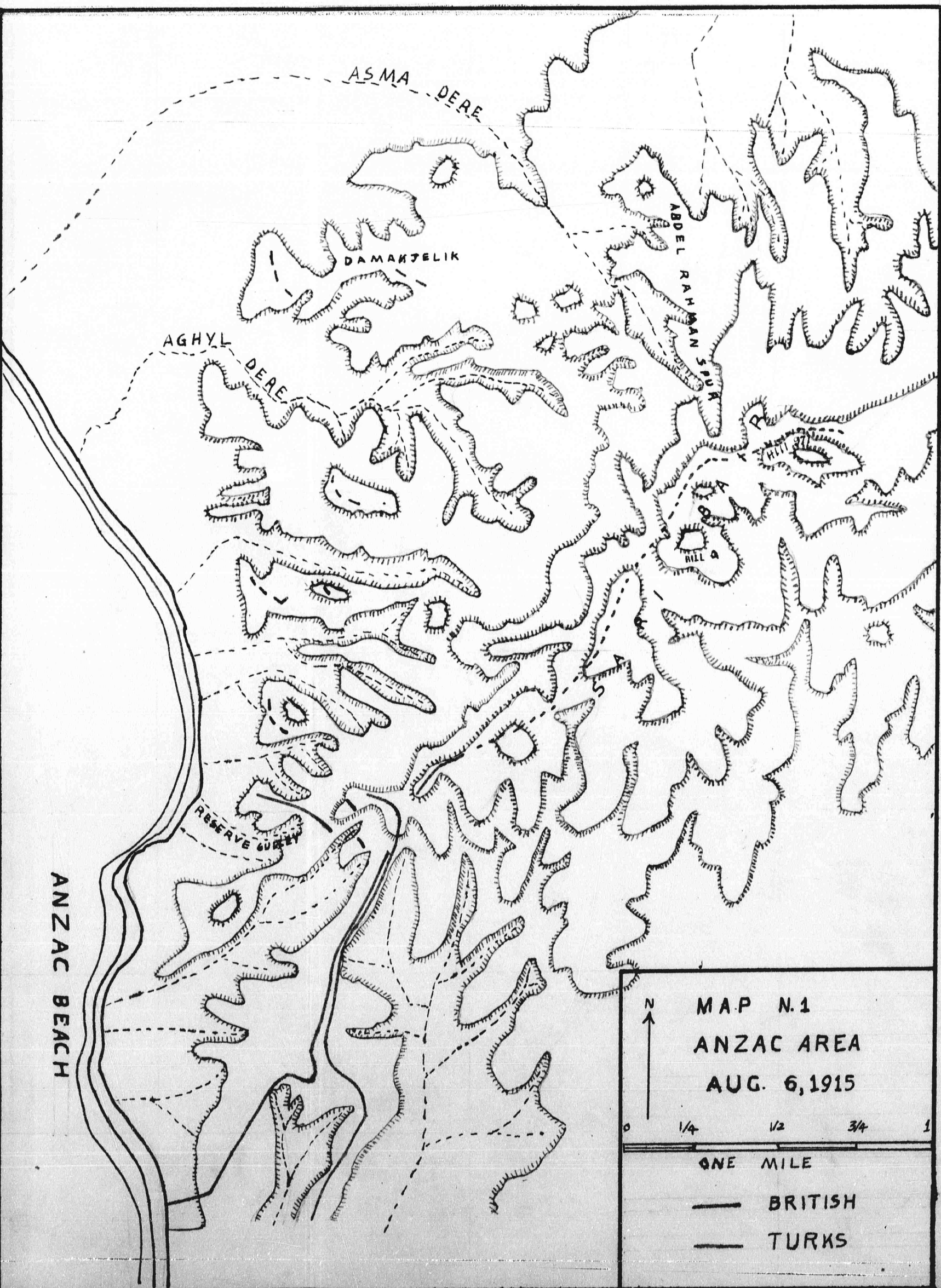
be rigidly adhered to as they are unfamiliar with the capabilities of military forces.

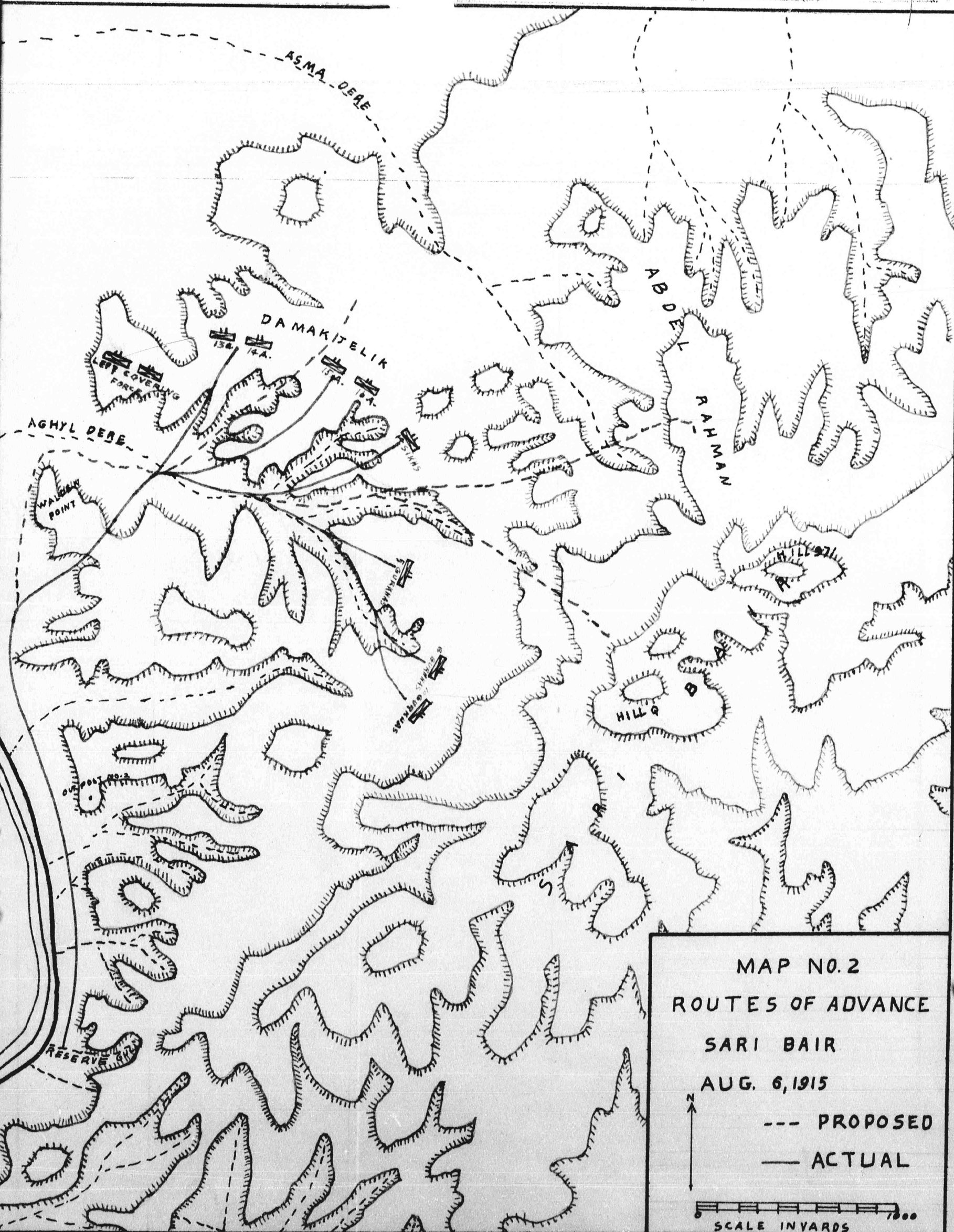
The route of advance was reconnoitered as much as the limitations of the situation permitted. The fact that the greater part of the way lay in territory held by the enemy might seem to have precluded any actual ground reconnaissance. However we see that by the action of Maj. Overton and his scouting parties, it is sometimes possible for a skillful man to penetrate and reconnoiter within the enemy's lines if the enemy holds the front lightly by outposts. Scanty as this reconnaissance was it shows its value as it is impossible to believe that the column would have reached the point it did without the guidance of Maj. Overton. It is interesting to speculate upon the value that modern aerial photography would have had in planning the route of advance.

Question: What do you think was the chief reason for the failure of the column?

Answer: The cause of failure was undoubtedly the delays which in most cases were avoidable. The lack of proper coordination between the force of General Cox and the Left Covering Force caused delay at the beginning of the march. However the greatest delay was caused by the change in route when the column forsook the longer but easier way around Walden Point for the shorter but difficult and unfamiliar trail recommended by the native guide.

The column came close to success, only these delays came between it and the keys to the Turkish position in Gallipoli, Hill Q and Hill 971.





MAP NO.3

SARI BAIR, PROFILE

---- ROUTE

HILL 971 HILLQ

SARI
BAIR

AGHYL DERE

